

The annual influenza immunization program will be provided again at WRAMC. This year, however, immunizations for our beneficiary population will be started later than usual due to a national delay in the availability of vaccine caused by manufacturing problems in supplying the vaccine.

Normally the military health program starts giving flu vaccinations in mid-October. This year, military beneficiaries, along with everyone else, will have to wait until mid-November.

The possibility of a vaccine shortage came to light early in the summer when some manufacturers had trouble getting one of the vaccine's live virus components to grow in the laboratory. Two of the vaccine manufacturers also have been experiencing manufacturing problems, one of which provides the majority of vaccine to the armed services.

On Sept. 28, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and its Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices advised health care providers, companies and other organizations, such as government agencies, to delay mass influenza vaccine campaigns for the 2000-2001 season until mid-November.

"Although the vaccine supply this year should be sufficient to meet the usual demand, the situation remains fluid and some questions about supply and demand will remain unanswered until much later into the flu season," CDC cautioned.

The CDC has recommended those persons at high risk and health care workers who provide direct patient care should be vaccinated first. The Department of Defense adopted CDC's recommendations and developed an immunization prioritization plan, which balances military readiness with the responsibility to protect the most vulnerable populations.

The plan includes delaying flu vaccination campaigns until mid-November, pending receipt of adequate supplies of vaccine. Military personnel and beneficiaries stationed in Southwest Asia, Korea and Eastern Europe, health care workers who provide direct patient care, and beneficiaries who have medical conditions that place them at high risk for influenza will have the highest priority for vaccinations from the limited supplies of vaccine that become available prior to the flu vaccination campaign.

The services will not provide occupational health influenza vaccinations previously provided to DoD Civilian employees, except those providing direct patient care and mission critical personnel, until sufficient vaccine is available. Instead, civilian employees will be directed to their own health-care providers.

If the flu season does not peak until January through March, as it has in recent years, most people will still be protected even with a delay in vaccination delivery. CDC usually monitors for flu beginning in October, but, reports of flu do not begin until November and more serious episodes have frequently been reported between January and March.

Flu vaccination schedules and procedures will be published as soon as availability of sufficient vaccine is known. WRAMC anticipates initiation of the mass flu vaccine campaign on 20 November in the Main Hospital, Heaton Pavilion Room 2H24.

The status of the WRAMC flu vaccination program will be posted on an information telephone recording at (202) 782-4341.

For details of the DOD Plan, you can visit the military health system/TRICARE Web site at www.tricare.osd.mil. More information about the national delay in the distribution of influenza vaccine and information about influenza is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.cdc.gov.